

Traditions renewed at the RCM

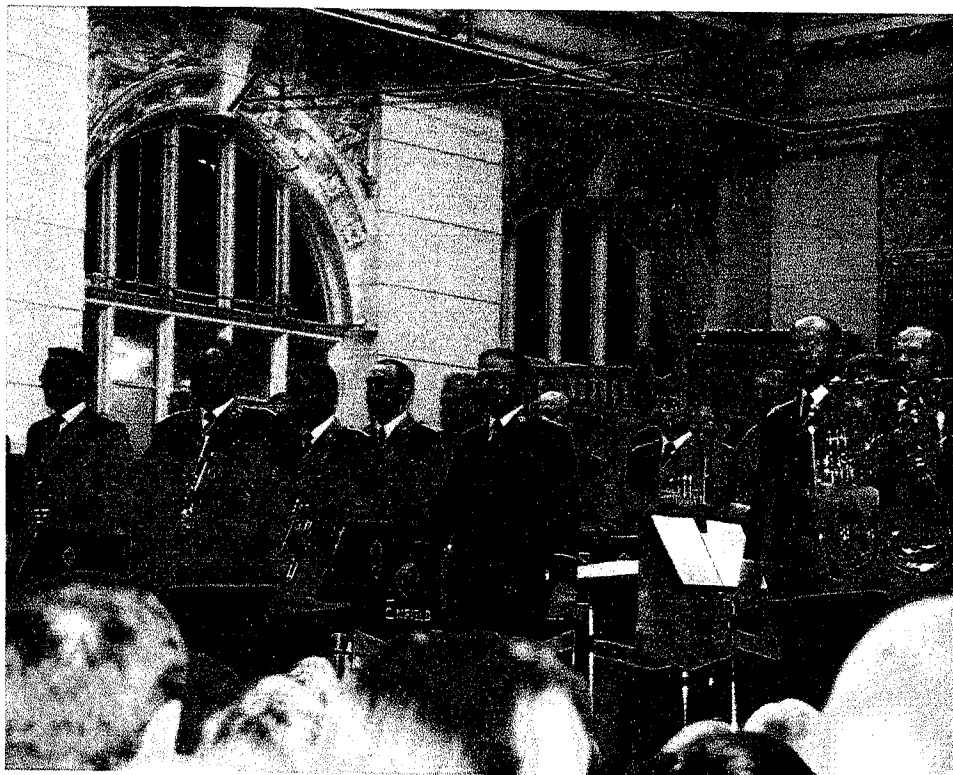


PHOTO: PAUL HINDMARSH

Pre-Contest Festival Enfield Citadel Band conducted by Andrew Blyth, 19 October, Royal College of Music

The pre-contest event has become part of the National Finals tradition and following the move to the Royal College of Music (RCM), just over the road from the Royal Albert Hall itself, the connection is now even closer. This was bandmaster Andrew Blyth's third pre-contest with Enfield Citadel Band. Taking over from the legendary James Williams was always going to be a challenge but on this evidence he is rising to it well as the band continues to fly the flag for Salvation Army (SA) music at its best.

The elegant hall was well filled for the band's customary mixture of musical entertainment and meditation. Celebrity chef Brian Turner – who was a Salvationist in his youth – was a genial host and Lt Col Lincoln Parkhouse provided the moments of devotion, thoughtfully delivered.

The programme mixed old and new in interesting juxtapositions. The opener, Dean Goffin's festival march from the 1950s, *Crusaders* is a curious mixture of Elgarian 'pomp' and the kind of irregular phrases and counterpoints that Goffin liked to use. Eric Ball's tone poem *Song of Courage* is one of the SA's enduring classics. This performance was on the fast side in the

difficult acoustic of the hall. Andrew Justice's stylish delivery of the trombone solo towards the end was a highlight. It was good also to hear an early piece of Wilfred Heaton. His march fantasy *The Golden Pen* was played through by an SA band in the early 1950s but subsequently lost. The realisation (by this writer) was delivered with panache by the band.

The up-tempo style of a lot of the new SA repertoire suits Enfield under Andrew Blyth, as in the final work on the evening, Steven Ponsford's *Turris Fortissima*. On the evidence of this well-worked selection of worship songs, with a most apt treatment of *Shout to the Lord* at its heart, Ponsford is an SA writer of some promise.

Less successful from a creative standpoint was Dick Krommenhoek's blues-inspired version of the lovely Easter song *From that sacred hill*. While it revealed just how good the whole trombone section of the band is, the simplicity of the original was lost. Leslie Condon showed how it should be done in his *Song of the Eternal*.

Guest soloist Steven Mead was at his virtuoso best in his two spots, making his euphonium sing in the evocative simplicity of Kenneth Downie's arrangement of *Down by the Sally Gardens* (and two Pavarotti tributes including *Nessun Dorma*) and dance in the Norman Bearcroft's *Locomotion* and Philip Sparke's *Harlequin*. PAUL HINDMARSH